

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOLDEN RULE.

By Rev. R. L. Benn.

The paramount need of life is some equitable, some ennobling, governing principle. To meet this requirement poets and philosophers, moralists and the Master of men have enunciated rules. Confucius, the sage of China, says, "What you do not like when done to yourself, do not do to others." That brilliant Athenian, Isocrates, says, "Do not do to others that which would make you angry, if done by others to you." Hillel, the most distinguished rabbi of the first century, says, "Do not unto another that thou wouldst not have another to do unto you." He who created the worlds and spake as never man spake, says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

This is the Christian's golden rule. It differs quite substantially from the others. The first three are negative and selfish principles. If one should really obey them, he would do nothing at all. One would abandon himself to a selfish, exclusive, useless life. The principle of Christ, however, is unselfish. It urges its adherent forward in positive goodness. It engenders dissatisfaction with a selfishly easy and negatively indolent life. Confucius and Isocrates and Hillel have long since died, but Christ still lives; for, indeed, all the progress of civilization, all the changes in the morals of mankind, all the uplifting ideals of education, all the transformations wrought through the missionary propaganda, are the advancing victory of the light which issued from him.

Christ affirmed this rule as the essence of the law and prophets. It is exceedingly broad. It embraces all relations of man to man. It comprehends every point where one's conduct touches a fellow being. "All things whatsoever" expresses its universality. It recognizes that no one lives an isolated and unrelated life; it shows that there are others deserving consideration besides one's self; it teaches that one's actions affect the welfare and destiny of others for weal or woe. "Wherefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." A principle of this kind makes one's own sense of justice and fitness the measure of his conduct toward others. It puts one on his honor. That which one would regard fair treatment under given circumstances, he should accord to others under similar circumstances. But scarcely anything is more alien to the spirit and practice of mankind. Man's inhumanity to man has ever been an appalling sin. In exactions and oppressions, in using another for selfish ends as the workman employs a tool, in condoning certain sins in one's self and condemning them in others, in tricks of phrase, in cunning deceptions, in paltry meannesses, in varied and manifold ways, how inhuman is man to man. From every quarter and from every station rises the heartening cry for that just and fair and manly treatment which man intuitively perceives, instinctively desires, and which Christ so earnestly commends.

This rule never loses sight of the man. It is not, therefore, a question of family, or social, or racial relationship; neither whether one has done us good or evil;

nor whether one will be an advantage or disadvantage to us, which must decide our consideration for others; but whether such an one is our fellow man, and if our places were reversed, how would we wish to be treated. In this way the king may ascertain his duty to his subjects and the subjects to their sovereign, the pastor to his people and the people to their pastor, the Christian to the Christian, and man to man in the differing ranks and walks of life. The question is answered and the problem of treatment is solved simply by exchanging places.

The Christian's rule overturns the world's rule of selfishness. The pickpocket plies life with the maxim. "The world owes me a living, and I am going to have it," and he proceeds to collect his debt. This same philosophy is cherished by countless members, not in finance merely, but in the subtler relations of life, and they spend their brief day in trying to collect what they falsely assume the world owes them. This mysterious influence of selfishness is felt on every hand. But Christ steps in when he hears one say, "The world owes me," and says, "I will pay you all the world owes you; I will assume the entire debt; I will discharge the obligation; I will pour out upon you such a wealth of resource that the balance shall be reversed, and you will owe the world." Neither Confucius, nor Isocrates, nor Hillel can do this, but Christ can, and he is actually doing it.

The relation which the Christian sustains to the world is that of a debtor. He does not claim that the world owes him either money, position, recognition, or anything; Christ has given him all these, which, indeed, makes him owe everybody. He is under necessity to do good unto all men. The genius of this superb rule ever reminds him that he is in a world of conventionalities and trifles, and that it is a mark of nobility to refrain from strife for names, and stations, and personal aggrandizement. It ever bids him to render unto all their due; tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. It encourages him to give to every one what belongs to him, and a little more; and to do his whole duty, and a little more, as evidence of that true love which is behind in nothing, and beforehand in all chivalry and integrity. Owe no man anything, but to love one another, for love is fulfilling of the law.

Who is sufficient for these things? A missionary repeated to the chief of a tribe of Indians, "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." The chief replied, "That is impossible. It can not be done." After some moments of thoughtful silence he added, "If the Great Spirit that made man would give him a new heart, he could do it, but not else." The poor savage chief with his crude ideas of the Great Spirit was right; for man's sufficiency lies in God's regenerating and sanctifying grace, and then he can say with Paul, "I can do all things in Christ which strengthen them." The divine strength is made perfect in human weakness.

It is only through labor and prayerful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage, that we move on to better things.—Theodore Roosevelt.